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This land is our land

by Will Nicholls

I recently read yet another editorial in a national paper calling for a change to Aboriginal communities' land rights – for their own good. The Conservative government has made a number of legislative moves in this direction, such as the First Nations Governance Act. Now some are lobbying the federal government to adopt the so-called First Nations Private Property Ownership Act. Each seeks to turn currently protected communal lands into private property that can be leveraged for economic gain. The real question, however, is whose gain?

A native Hawaiian Elder once said it well at a North American conference – the U.S. Constitution guarantees individuals rights of mobility to go anywhere, but we as Indigenous peoples want a guarantee of the right of immobility so that we don't have to give up our lands and move from our ancestral territory.

In fact, the U.S. Constitution decrees that only the government may do business with the First Peoples. That's because private citizens and companies were taking Native lands in crooked deals that swindled Indigenous peoples out of their lands. So, they threw this protection in, and created the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In Canada, the British North America Act created protections that were fleshed out in the federal Department of Indian Affairs and the Indian Act.

Today, we look at what happened when these protections were removed in the U.S. We see private citizens, banks and companies gaining control of Native lands, which created what is known as checkerboard reservations. You could own a house in your community and a non-Native house or business would be next door to you as the former "owner" lost their private right to the property. When we look at economic opportunities, with writs and other legal devices we have been able to use our interests to leverage for businesses even in the current realities.

In Canada, discussions are starting again to try to create private home ownership on First Nations land. This is at a time when the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations said that Aboriginal peoples live below the poverty line in Third World conditions. It is also the time when companies are the most interested in the land for resource development. So, when it comes to ownership of the land, will it be Native peoples or private interests that will benefit the most out of taking protections from the land and allow it to be leveraged and taken?

There also arises the issue of the special nature of trust that Aboriginal peoples collectively hold the land in for present and future generations of their peoples. Individuals cannot disenfranchise the collective rights of a group. The nature of their bundle of rights is small compared to that of the entire group of a collective-based society.

Finally, the notion of taxes must be addressed. By definition, only those who have the underlying title of land can tax. This is why Natives enjoy taxation benefits; they are the original titleholders. That they occupied the land for thousands of years is undisputed. Agreements and commitments were made to ensure rights such as these continued. So, you cannot tax those who you do not have the right to tax when the rights over the land are clear and collectively held.

Then there is Eeyou Istchee. With a modern land-claim agreement in the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement clearly defining land categories, how could privatization evolve or amend the nature of the three categories of our land? While there is an agreement on certain types of powers or uses in each category of land, there is not one for privatization and the taking of rights from the collective nature of the land ownership and protections.

Individual or private rights do not exist that could take what is not theirs to give.

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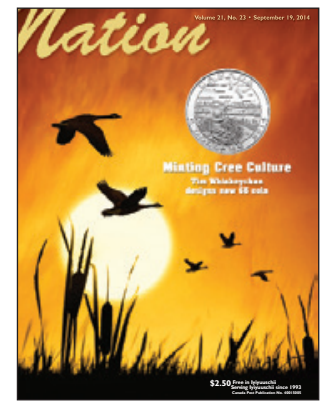

Jet set rez

by Joshua Iserhoff

Greetings from London! (UK please and thank you!) I'm actually en route for Paris as I write this; call me International Josh.

I don't know about you but I love to travel. I have never been to London and at 36, I regret not coming here earlier. There's something about London that makes you feel like a royal. Perhaps it's the Queen's energy or the exclusive shops that lure the soul to scream out, "I must have this!"

My style has gone very conservative since entering the world of politics. What London has taught me is to be fearless and to care less of what humans think. Let your confidence exude and not the clothes.

It's a different terre out here and I'm absolutely wild about it. When I say wild, they have dog parties. Like rich dog-owner parties. I stumbled upon one while strolling along Mount Street with my friend Alex (who by the way leads the French Lacoste line) and all I see is flashing mobs.

Everyone's screaming "Claire! Claire! Over here!" I'm standing next to actress Claire Forlani (Meet Joe Black). She's a pint-sized gal and I could immediately tell she don't have any black in her.

Ooh la la Paris! The city of love with my sister Fawn. The romantic feeling stirs within but I try not to go into the abyss of love with anyone but to a fresh baguette. If you are trying to quit smoking this isn't a place for you. I swear I must've inhaled a couple of packs just sitting fabulously in Champs-Élysées. Wine and bread is their diet. I don't know if we could handle their mode de vie.

If you love art, especially really old art, the Musée du Louvre is your stop. I am glad that Mona Lisa wasn't on vacation when we went to see her. She hasn't changed at all. By the way, you may stumble upon stars! Mr. "All of Me" singer John Legend and his stunning wife were standing next to us. They are the cutest in the world as dubbed by my fb friend, Kristina Ana-Maria. I agree!

It was a brief stay in the 9ème arrondissement but next time, I hope that Ernie Webb joins us because he looks Parisien and I know he has lots of good friends around this side of the "monde."

We are off to Germany now by TGV, the speed train traveling at 300 kph. Mother Nature's epic botox remedy until you reach your destination but in the meantime I'll be taking tonnes of #selfies. By the way, get yourself a selfie stick. It's God's perfect gadget for the selfie addict.

Traveling doesn't require loads of cash. If you wanna see Europe, you can at a cheap price. Book ahead! It's not like our northern prices at all. If you can make friends wherever you are, you can stay with them and let me tell you, friends from over here absolutely love foreigners (us). If you're planning to travel, travel light & I'm learning the hard way. I packed way too much of my Valentino haute couture collection ;)

Ich hoffe sie bald zu sehen! (I hope to see you soon.)

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Shifting gears

William Phillip Shecapio and La Groupe Swiftrans address CSB bussing controversy

By Jesse Staniforth

Bernard Caouette says he wants to set the record straight about the school bussing contract controversy that has shaken the Cree School Board.

"One thing we got from the demonstration [at the Annual General Assembly] was that there was a lot of disinformation that came from somewhere," he told the Nation in an interview. "There was information missing in some places. So there you go."

Caouette is assistant general manager and attorney for Quebec City-based La Groupe Swiftrans, parent company to the recently formed Gingras-Shecapio firm. Last spring Gingras-Shecapio won a contract to provide school transportation services for all of the Cree School Board outside Whapmagoostui. Previously, local companies serviced each community.

Responding to accusations that his company's contract will force Cree businesses to close, Caouette said, "We've hired the same personnel, the same garages, the same repair-people, the same drivers, the same bus monitors. So I can't see who's losing out very much as a result of this decision."

Right now, Caouette said, Gingras-Shecapio is in the process of "resolving the problem" of the controversy around the bus deal, which he says affects only "two communities."

"There were no problems with other communities," he said. "There were two communities that were more problematic than others. For the others, everything was welcomed. We're discussing with the communities concerned. We will be providing the necessary information to show that this company really exists. It's not a front. Mr. Shecapio really is director of operations."

William Phillip Shecapio, meanwhile, is not pleased with his portrayal as an opportunist in the situation. The company Gingras-Shecapio was entered officially into the provincial registry of heavy-vehicle owners and operators in July 2014, but Shecapio says the Gingras-Shecapio partnership actually began in March 2013. He also pointed out that he has worked with the Gingras family business in charter-buses and oversize vehicles for some eight years.

photo by H. Michael Miley

Though the parent company La Groupe Swiftrans operates companies in Ontario and Fort Lauderdale, Shecapio stressed this has nothing to do with him or the company of which he is 51% shareholder in Eeyou Istchee.

"I don't have jurisdiction there," he said, pointing out that his concern remains entirely in the Cree Nation. "For us, we said we're only going to hire local people from each community, and the economy should stay in the community. Maintenance and oil and stuff that can all be done in the communities, will be done there. As of today I have two certified Cree mechanics who can mobilize and do the inspections. Employment was one of the main keys for us – to hire in the local communities."

Beyond that, Shecapio is hesitant to comment on various criticisms, but says concerns will be put to rest. "Right now we're on the table to resolve the issues with the two communities," he promised.

He refused to specify which two communities are involved in

this effort. Nor would he comment when asked about how many Cree businesses might have to close as a result of the contract, or what the percentage of profits that would remain in Eeyou Istchee versus the proportion that would leave the Cree economy.

"The profit margin is not very large," Caouette retorted. "I'm not really in the right position to answer that [precisely], but the revenues, principally, will remain in the Cree communities."

To Caouette, the dispute about bussing is an exaggeration and a misunderstanding, and he is convinced that the decision will be in the best interests of all concerned.

"Mr. Shecapio's desire is to [provide] school transportation, to bring in expertise and the necessary capital capable of making the investments and giving a first-rate service at the best possible price. That's what motivated the association of the [Mr. Shecapio and Mr. Gingras]," he said. "This is a company where the majority is controlled by a Cree. The head office is in the Cree territory. All the personnel and employees are Crees. It's an issue of perception. This is a Cree company."

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Living with the land

Public hearings on uranium development begin in Mistissini

by Jesse Staniforth

Hearing the Cree legend of the giant skunk and the wolverine, many listeners might think the story is really about its conclusions: "and that's why skunks are so small today," or "that's why James Bay has salt water." But really, the story is about context. On September 4, the Bureau des Audiences Publiques sur l'Environment's (BAPE) held its first of three hearings on uranium in Mistissini, and Eastmain's culture coordinator Jamie Moses addressed the panel by recounting the legend.

At its core, the legend tells of a giant skunk that terrorizes a village. After the skunk kills his sister, the wolverine is brave enough to attack it and sink its teeth into the skunk's hind-quarters, helping the others overpower and kill it. Once the skunk was dead, they cut it into pieces, which is the reason why skunks are so small today.

However, the wolverine was blinded by the giant skunk's poisonous spray. Rather than wash the poison out of his eyes in his home community, he wandered blind into the forest and asked the trees to tell him what kind of tree they are. Using that information he carefully followed the inland trees to the coastal trees, to the brushes at the edge of James Bay. There, he washed the poison out of his eyes, leaving the water in the bay unsafe to drink.

In his presentation to the BAPE, Moses didn't mention uranium once, but he took his time retelling the legend of the giant skunk and the wolverine. Because of that, it was easy to hear the other themes in the story: the wolverine who's willing to risk his own safety to save his community from the danger of the giant skunk. The desire, once having defeated his enemy, not to pollute his community by washing poison out of his eyes close to home. And, of course, listening to the wisdom of the land and following directions from the trees themselves to get to a safe place where he can finally use the riches of the earth to help him see again.

Eastmain's culture coordinator Jamie Moses

It was another kind of statement against the proposed Matoush uranium project. In today's terms, the Grand Council of the Crees issued a statement reiterating its total opposition to uranium exploitation in Eeyou Istchee.

"The profits from uranium mining are short-lived, but the tonnes of tailings that will inevitably be left behind will remain toxic and radioactive for hundreds of thousands of years," said Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come. "Eeyou Istchee is blessed with an abundance of natural resources, and these provide immense opportunities for cooperative and sustainable development, without mining uranium."

Meanwhile, speaking in Iqaluit, Abitibi-James Bay-Nunavik-Eeyou MP Romeo Saganash told the Nunatsiaq News that a majority of Crees were opposed to the project.

"There is no social acceptance of that project, either from the Cree or from the non-Native population in the region, so that is something we have to take into consideration," added Saganash.

But Moses was less direct in his BAPE intervention. Instead, he talked about the long history of his relationship with the land, which began when he was too young to work and watched his grandfather cut and carry wood. It continues today: because his grandfather is too old to do the work himself, it's now Moses who cuts and carries the wood for him.

"I never did drugs in my life, and I never had problems with alcohol, because I was out on the land," he told the BAPE panel. "My grandfather took me out in the weekends. I was out late, busy with my grandfather."

A good relationship with the land is personal, emotional and builds confidence, said Moses. But the modern lifestyle discourages young people from building a sustained and complex relationship with the land. For that reason, he organizes two-week, three-week and month-long trips with young people from his community to pass on the teachings he received from his grandfather.

However, Moses said that his experience on the land showed that the development of dams and turbines was a threat to more than just the terrain that ended up under water. Working on the Eastmain River prior to the Paix des Braves, Moses heard only the Cree names for locations on the rivers – and he was surprised afterward to hear members of the Hydro-Québec team refer to locations with a kilometre number.

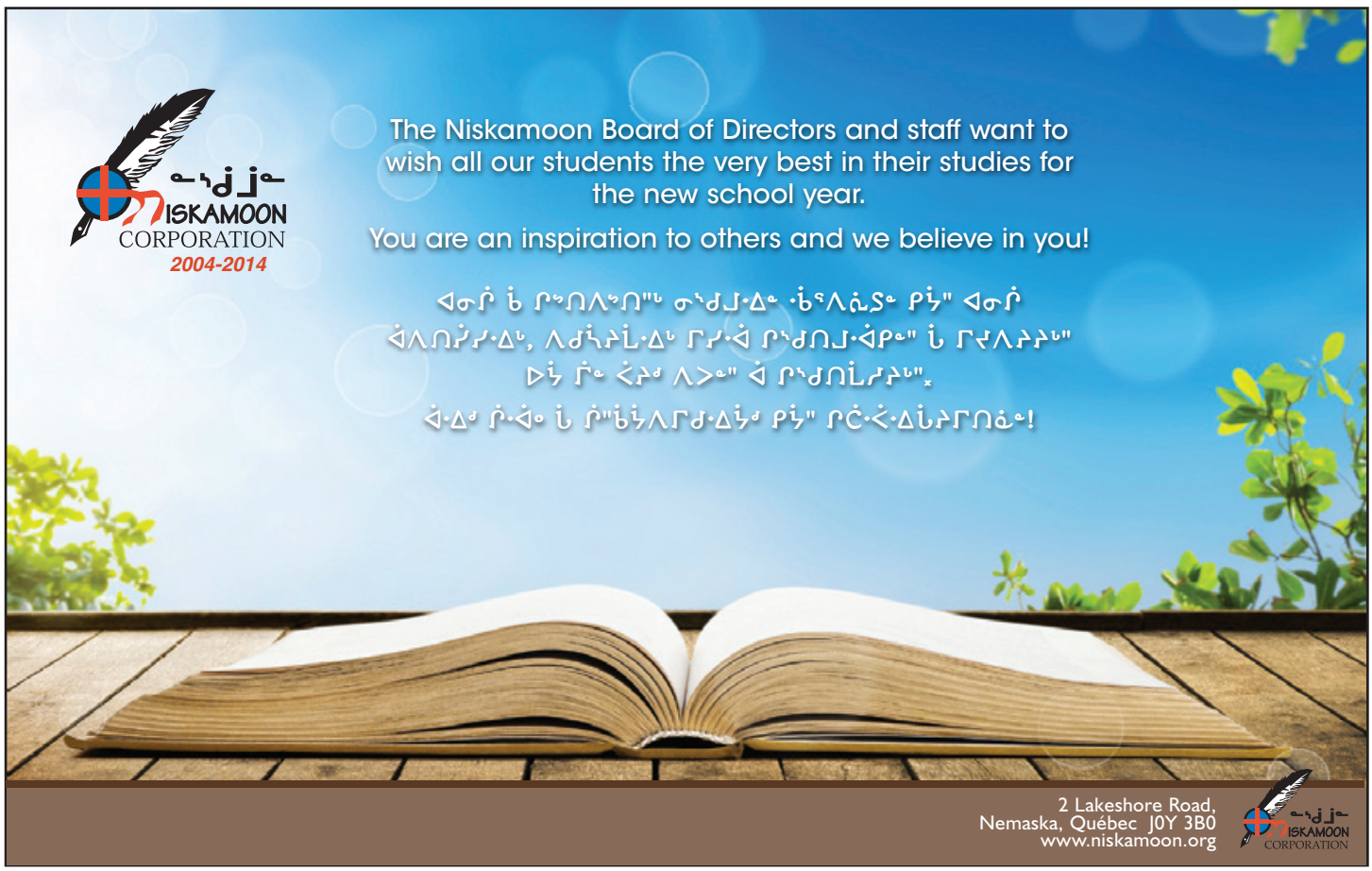
"I want my children to inherit the same hunting rights, the same privileges I have to go out and fish any time I want, the same privilege to get berries at this time of year. I want them to have the same excitement that I have right now knowing that moose hunt is about to start. And […] I want them to refer to locations using the Cree names and express themselves using our language."

The continued existence of the land is central to all of that, Moses told the BAPE, and it is the thread that ties all of Cree history together. "I've seen locations where people were buried and locations where people were born. I've been to portages where people portaged long ago. I paddled the same rivers they paddled. I walked on snowshoes in the same areas. I witnessed children put their first snowshoes on."

Though he's studied in French and speaks three languages, Moses has turned down opportunities to go to college in favour of staying home close to the land.

"I choose to be at home and learn my heritage," he said. "Set footprints on the snow each winter, [use] my traditional paddle on the rivers and the lakes, and scoop water from the rivers and the lakes and drink it fresh from the cup."

In closing his statement to the BAPE, Moses said, "If I wasn't here in Mistissini, I'd be out at a camp, berry picking or looking for my first moose. There's plenty of young people my age and even younger doing this today. I hope we'll continue doing this for the next generation as well."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New school opens in Attawapiskat

Attawapiskat elementary school students will attend a modern, brick-and-mortar school this year – something they haven't done for more than a decade.

The new Kattawapiskak Elementary School will include 16 regular classrooms, five nursery and kindergarten classrooms, and three special-needs classrooms. It will also include a classroom dedicated to teaching Cree culture. Kattawapiskak is a traditional Cree word for community.

Construction on the $31 million project began in 2012 and is being funded by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

Finally winning that investment was a long, difficult struggle. And the new school is seen as a victory for the small, northern community.

Community members have been campaigning for the school since 2000, when a fuel pump located under Attawapiskat's only elementary school burst, contaminating the area and forcing students to relocate.

Since then students have attended classes in dilapidated portables, some of which were poorly heated.

One of the most prominent and powerful voices in the community's fight to build a new school was Shannen Koostachin. She attended school in the portables, and at 13 she began raising awareness about the issue, meeting with political officials and giving talks across the country.

Tragically, Koostachin died at 15 in a car accident in 2010.

Cree Government joins Conservation Union

The Cree Nation Government is now an official member of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Based in Switzerland, the IUCN aims to "influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable."

The CNG was optimistic about the new alliance in a press release earlier this month, saying the organization's principles on conservations were consistent with Cree values. The Cree leadership hopes to participate in the IUCN's Working Group on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples.

According to the CNG statement, "Our vision is to maintain strong ties to the Cree cultural heritage and way of life, and sustain biodiversity by creating a large, interconnected network of conservation areas in Eeyou Istchee."

Cree delegates will attend the IUCN World Parks Congress in Sydney, Australia, this November.

Kepa crash

A Kepa Transport truck heading southbound on the Laurentien Autoroute slammed into the pillar of an overpass early Monday morning on September 8 just outside of Saint-Jérôme.

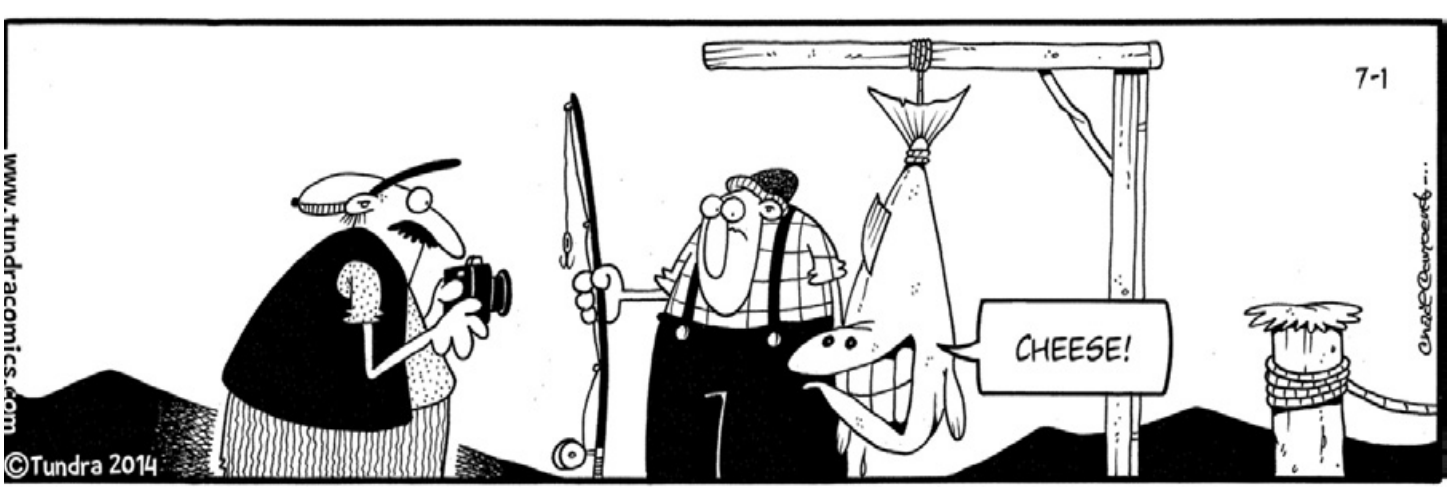
The driver reportedly suffered slight injuries.

photo: John Bosum

The truck, carrying particleboard, was traveling from Val-d'Or to Montreal when it ran off the highway and into the bank of the overpass.

Kepa Transport, jointly owned by the communities of Chisasibi and Wemindji, was unwilling to speak to the Nation in light of the ongoing police investigation into the accident.

An engineer with Transports Québec has inspected the affected overpass and cleared it for use.



First steps

The Cree hold their first nation-to-nation meeting with the new Quebec premier

by Amy German

When the provincial government switched from the Parti Québécois to the Quebec Liberal Party last April as Premier Philippe Couillard took over the helm, it gave the Cree the chance to put new issues on the table and form new partnerships.

On September 3, the first official Cree-Quebec meeting took place between Couillard, Minister responsible for Native Affairs Geoff Kelly, Liberal Ungava MNA Jean Boucher and their officials and Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come, Deputy Grand Chief Rodney Mark, Executive Director Bill Namagoose, Cree Negotiator Abel Bosum and lawyer John Hurley of Gowlings.

The two sides sat down in Quebec City to discuss the region and its future by initiating a dialogue and a relationship based on a nation-to-nation process.

According to Coon Come, the meeting's goal was to offer solutions and set up future processes rather than to submit a list of grievances.

While the Cree had a specific list of issues to address with the premier, Coon Come said it was a cordial meeting. The following interview contains Coon Come's impressions of this first face-to-face meeting with the new Quebec leadership.

The Nation (TN): What was the plan on the behalf of the GCC with the first official Cree-Quebec meeting with Premier Couillard?

Grand Chief Coon Come (GC): This first official meeting with Couillard was very positive. We had several objectives. The first was to establish direct working relations between the premier and myself in order to continue developing the nation-to-nation relationship between the Cree and Quebec. We wished to remind the premier of the special status and rights of the Cree under the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement treaty, the Paix des Braves and the Cree-Quebec Governance Agreement. A key objective was to advise the premier of the Cree perspective on the Plan Nord. And we discussed how to advance specific files of importance to the Cree of Eeyou Istchee.

TN: What was discussed regarding the road improvement of the James Bay Highway?

GC: I informed the premier that the condition of the James Bay Highway requires urgent attention due to years of neglect. I strongly recommended that major repairs for the highway be addressed on a priority basis. I also requested that Quebec address the shortfall in funding for maintenance of the highway due to the reduction in Hydro Québec's contribution.

TN: What was discussed regarding the Broadback River project?

GC: Deputy Grand Chief Rodney Mark requested the premier's support for rapid implementation of the Broadback Watershed Conservation Plan, including park and protected area designations as well as special management buffer zones.

TN: As the Plan Nord is back but now being looked at as a second edition, how does it vary from when the Liberals were last in power?

GC: Quebec's approach is somewhat different, since its focus is now more on specific projects. The Cree approach remains as outlined in the Cree Vision of Plan Nord, which I gave to the premier. Our approach calls for respect for Cree rights under the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, the Paix des Braves and the Cree-Quebec Governance Agreement. In addition, projects in Eeyou Istchee must be environmentally and socially acceptable and provide real benefits to the Cree in terms of employment and business opportunities.

TN: What were your impressions of it?

GC: I found the premier's approach to Plan Nord practical and positive. He knows that the Plan Nord can only succeed with the support of the Aboriginal nations of the North, in particular, that of the Cree. We indicated that the Cree wish to reactivate the special Cree-Quebec process for the Plan Nord in order to advance specific, priority Cree projects.

TN: What was discussed regarding energy?

GC: We asked the premier for clarification of Quebec's intentions regarding the development of renewable energy projects. We requested Quebec to set aside a

photo: Patrick Lachance MCE

Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come greets Premier Philippe Couillard

block of renewable energy for the Cree communities of Eeyou Istchee.

TN: Was there anything new outlined or discussed regarding the ECN Phase 2 fibre optic project?

GC: We advised Couillard that it is urgent to deploy Phase 2 of the ECN Project since the health, education, public security, justice, education and other services in Eeyou Istchee rely on the ECN network. Phase 2 work is critical to reinforce network robustness by closing the fibre-optic ring. This project should be considered as a priority for funding.

TN: I also see that Washaw-Sibi, Cree Development Corporation (CDC), health and Cree governance and Cree Canada issues were discussed. Can you briefly discuss what was talked about here?

GC: Regarding Washaw Sibi, we requested that a Cree-Quebec process be established to address the site selected by Washaw Sibi for its future village.

Regarding the Cree Development Corporation, we pointed out that it will serve as one of the main vehicles for Cree economic development and investment. The CDC can make strategic investments and it will play a vital role in ensuring Cree participation in Plan Nord opportunities. Cree members of the board of directors of the CDC have been designated. We asked that Quebec appoint its representatives to the CDC board of directors as soon as possible. These directors should facilitate partnerships between Cree and Quebec businesses.

Regarding health, Couillard, as Minister of Health and Social Services in 2005, supported the Cree-Quebec Health Agreement signed that year. He visited Chisasibi and Wemindji during these negotiations. We pointed out some of the improvements already made by the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay in first-line services to the Cree communities, including new or renovated clinics. We noted that the development of services and facilities will continue under the renewed Health Agreement of 2012. We asked for the premier's support in addressing some outstanding questions, including the revision of the law governing the Cree Health Board.

Regarding the Cree-Quebec Governance Agreement, we informed the premier of the status of implementation, including the assumption of new governance functions by the Cree Nation Government on Category II lands and the operation of the new Eeyou Istchee James Bay Regional Government on Category III lands. We requested that Quebec formalize with us the boundary adjustment process provided for in the Governance Agreement.

As for Cree-Canada issues, we advised Couillard of Canada's attempts to impose its Self-Government Policy and Own Source Revenue Policy on the Cree in the negotiation of the Cree-Canada Governance Agreement. We stated that the Cree reject this position as contrary to our treaty rights under the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement.

TN: What will you be following up on at the next meeting with Quebec?

GC: Couillard and I agreed to meet on a regular basis. The next meeting will take place in about six months. We will review the progress made on the files already mentioned, and address any other issues that may need our attention. I have also invited Couillard to visit us in Eeyou Istchee.

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Roundtable wrap up

Focus shifts to planning the Cree future after enormous consultation finishes tour

by Amy German

Now that the Roundtable on Capacity Building has finished touring nine Cree communities, involving wide swaths of Cree society and receiving thousands of comments and suggestions on how to make the Eeyou Istchee better for its people, the question is, what happens now?

The Roundtable process began in March 2013 in Ottawa and then hosted a two-day event of oral history and discussions in each community. According to Nian Matoush, the co-chair for the Roundtable's Regional Planning Committee, the effort proved a grand success in sharing important messages.

"It was to mobilize the community, the parents, the youth and even the Elders to some extent. It was to realize this objective that we all have a part in capacity building," said Matoush.

And that part, she explained, it's all about what an individual can contribute to the growth of their community through their skills and abilities.

The data from the events is still being tabulated, comments catalogued, and oral histories that emerged from tour speakers and Elders archived, Matoush said. But she emphasized the immediate impact of the historic process that emerged through the reactions of people. She felt it in every thank you, handshake and hug that came at the end of the day of presentations and discussions from the participants.

What really proved effective, in her opinion, was the format for the event, which consisted of specially designed PowerPoint presentations combined with having those leaders who made history on hand to deliver the history in a storytelling format. Participants were then offered the opportunity to contribute to change by putting forth their ideas at the Cree Cafés.

"This was the ideal follow-up because whatever people did not have the chance to say during the presentations, they were able to do afterwards," said Matoush.

The youth in attendance would often approach Matoush after the events to find out more about how they could contribute and would often end up following up with Post-Secondary Students Services.

"The format was one million times more effective than what you could read in a book because along with the presentation you got the anecdotes and the jokes and so you could actually envision the person at that point in time, like in 1971, getting mobilized and visiting the Elders in the communities and getting their ideas," said Matoush.

"You could actually feel this, the feelings that they had at that time and you could identify with them so much."

According to Matoush, she often witnessed Elders jumping at the chance to pick up the microphones and contribute and would return on the second day to talk more.

According to Darryl Diamond, who was part of the Roundtable's Regional Planning Committee and also helped out with the Cree Café portion of the tour, it was all about gathering information from the people on various subjects.

Chief Louis and Nian Matoush

"In the first seven communities and the visits we did in the winter and springtime of this year, we had discussions with high-school students to get feedback on life in the school and in the community. We partnered with the teachers who facilitated these discussions and documented everything," said Diamond.

A log of all of the comments made at these events will be recorded in the final report on Roundtable tour.

SCHOOL ELECTIONS 2014
November 2

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Here is a summary:

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According to Diamond, the process was similar to the one that the communities used to discuss the signing of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement back in 1970s to get an understanding of the people's concerns.

Preservation of lifestyle, housing, education and health were among the most common topics addressed.

Diamond said the group from the Roundtable also met with local coordinators to identify the priorities for each community so that strengths, weaknesses and resources could be discussed.

The result was engaging discussions where even those who may have just sat down to listen would end up making observations and contributions regarding culture, language and Cree life.

"At the Cree Cafés Elders would comment about their own childhoods and then express their concerns about the future generations. They would underline the drastic change we have experienced in our everyday life. We could see what a wonder it is to still have our traditions, language and our Elders to teach us," said Diamond.

"At the same time, we had these youth saying that they didn't know their language and didn't want to know their language and so the spectrum of perspectives was incredibly vast."

After the tour's final stop in Oujé-Bougoumou and with one last presentation yet to make for the MoCreebec Cree, the regional group is still digesting the opinions, reflections and ideas that were expressed.

"Obviously we do see the trends as the Roundtable committee is not the only one who has been documenting where the Cree Nation has been going. This is one of the recent ones where we have been able to pinpoint how a community feels about its growth and its concerns," said Diamond.

At the same time, because a great deal of the event was about transmission of oral history, Diamond said that they are considering making the report for this event in a video format.

"Our other intention for the Cree Café documentation is that we want it to go to the Boards of Directors, to the managers and management and say why not strike up a working partnership with the business department or the health department or whatever so that the needs of the communities can be seen and addressed," said Diamond.

Louisa Saganash, chair for the Roundtable's Regional Planning Committee, said she was able to see firsthand the personal history of each community. Saganash stressed the importance of preserving these history lessons for future generations.

"In Nemaska they were showing pictures of the old, old days and this really touched me. We can't lose sight of where we come from and by seeing some of these images, of a little girl being pulled on a sled in the snow, I remembered being part of that. We tend to forget where we come from. I think we all need to know our history in order to find ourselves again," said Saganash.

She added that this is important for Cree youth because many do not realize where they come from or know the leaders of the past and how Cree society came to be where it is today.

"If they can see that and get that vision then it will help them to go forward and with their education get jobs. As I will be mentioning in the report, there is so many resources out there to help them. It is all so available and there is no reason as to why they shouldn't get their education," said Saganash.

It is Saganash's hope that through this tour that the Cree youth were able to realize just how much their nation needs them.

According to Saganash, individual reports will be made for each community event before a final strategy report is issued on how to implement the conclusions drawn from this ambitious project.

David Suzuki and Adult Education teachers

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Artwork you can bank on

Tim Whiskeychan designs artwork for new $5 coin

by Jeremy East

Tim Whiskeychan has been celebrating traditional Cree culture through his art for years, but one of his recent pieces is guaranteed to be collector's item.

One of the Waskaganish artist's designs has been selected to appear on $5 silver coins produced by the Royal Canadian Mint (RCM). The coin is the last in a series of four that celebrates different First Nations hunting traditions. Whiskeychan chose to represent the Cree Nations with the goose.

"When I was asked to submit a design for the coin, they wanted a Cree version of hunting," said Whiskeychan. "I decided I'd try to pass on the traditional teachings of hunting geese with bow and arrows."

Whiskeychan set out into the bush with his daughter and took photos of what he wanted the image to look like to help perfect the composition of his design. The first submission was rejected the RCM, but Whiskeychan took the decision in stride. Several months later, he was contacted again. The mint wanted a new concept, this one with a single hunter instead of the two people featured in his original design.

At the behest of his family, Whiskeychan headed for the Aanischaaukamikw Cultural Institute in Oujé-Bougoumou to find some inspiration.

"Looking at the traditional clothes and hunting tools in Oujé, my idea for the design came to me, but I wanted to make sure that I represented the tradition of the goose hunt correctly," said Whiskeychan.

Over the next few weeks, the artist applied himself to the task of creating the coin's image: a hunter in traditional clothing aiming his bow up at flying geese from behind a tamarack blind. By corresponding with anthropologists and officials at the institute in Oujé to find out what the scene would have looked like generations ago, Whiskeychan's vision started to take shape.

"I took another photo of myself for composition, this time just me with my bow and arrow aiming at the sky. On the bottom left of the design is a caribou bag for the hunter to put his catch in."

Whiskeychan made no mistake with his second effort and the RCM jumped at the chance to have 10,000 of the collector's coins minted.

Accolades arrived soon after.

"These type of milestones mark historical moments for us as a Nation," Diane Reid told Whiskeychan in a letter on behalf of Aanischaaukamikw. "It is individuals like you who share with us in the collective pride of our accomplishments."

With the coin's mintage, Whiskeychan joins a handful of First Nations and Inuit artist to have their art commissioned by the RCM. According to Whiskeychan, the collaboration would not have been impossible without Nadine St. Louis and Cecilia Bond of Sacred Fire Productions. Sacred Fire has successfully promoted several Aboriginal artists over the past several years. In 2013, the Nation reported on Ulaayu Pilurtuut, an Innu artist who also collaborated with the group and had one of her paintings featured on a $5 coin.

Whiskeychan has earned great notoriety as a traditional artist in Quebec over the years. Yet, while his coin will only increase his artistic footprint, he isn't letting it go to his head.

"People have been telling me that it's a big deal, but I'm just taking it day by day," laughed Whiskeychan. "You can't let things go to your head because art comes from the heart."

Ultimately, the artist credits this piece to what he learned from Elders, and particularly his father, the late Harry Whiskeychan. Harry specialized in making tamarack decoys for goose season.

"My father taught me about the livelihood of our people and how important it is to maintain our connection to the land," said Tim. "As an artist I try to bring that out in my work to preserve and explain how important that way of life still is today."

Whiskeychan's coin can be ordered at any post office, and is available for purchase online at www.mint.ca/store

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Buffing up Nemaska

Strongman Hugo Girard hoists healthy living in the community

By Jeremy East

The Cree Nation of Nemaska may have the smallest population in Eeyou Istchee, but if Hugo Girard has his way, it will be home to the biggest biceps of the North.

Girard, known for winning numerous international strongman competitions – including the title of "North America's Strongest Man" in 2001 and 2002 – is putting his 330-lb frame to work on a monthly basis at the Nemaska Sports Complex. After five years hosting Strongman and Fitness competitions in the community, the 42-year-old recently decided to start visiting aspiring athletes there on a monthly basis.

"Last year I talked about the possibility of starting a program to introduce training, nutrition and healthy lifestyles within the community," said Girard. "In May, I started going every month and I guide people through their training. Whoever comes, I meet with them and give them advice on technique, nutrition and supplements as well."

Nemaska's most recent Strongman competition was held during the community's 19th Annual Cree Nation Fitness Challenge July 24-27. This year, 10 professional competitors went head to head in what has become a marquee event during the annual competition.

With it, the event has brought new strongman training equipment to the North. Deadlift bars, atlas stones and farmer's carry equipment are all available outside the Nemaska Recreation Centre.

The winner of this year's event was Shawn Coonishish of the Eeyou Eenou Police Force.

"I was very proud of what Shawn accomplished," said Girard. "He worked very hard and his success has proved that. I hope to see him competing soon at the professional level."

Coonishish had been training intermittently with Girard for two years, but says that the superstar's recent monthly visits are bringing healthy attitudes in Nemaska to new heights.

"It's a huge benefit for the youth to have him here," said Coonishish. "You see a lot more faces at the gym and he's promoting a good, healthy lifestyle."

For Coonishish, the road to success required plenty of hard work – even with one of the world's best trainers helping him along. But he acknowledged

that Nemaska's increased gym occupancy is proof that hard work can pay off for anyone.

"When people start to see progress or change they want to keep pushing forward," said Coonishish, adding with a laugh that sometimes an improvement can come just by "talking less and training more" while in the gym.

In Girard's program, a healthy lifestyle doesn't stop when you leave the gym. The strongman is a huge proponent of proper nutrition and dieting.

"It's not just about weight training, but also about learning the tools to improve your lifestyle," said Girard, who also provides advice on how to supplement a healthy diet with protein and vitamins, which is a vital part of the muscle-building process. "I go into the community and I eat pretty healthy. People here have everything on hand to eat properly."

Girard hails from the tiny town of Sainte-Anne-de-Portneuf, and says his visits to Nemaska remind him of his youth.

"I like Nemaska because the pace of time there feels different," said Girard. "People care about each other and I've worked hard to build trust with people in the community and they return that trust."

With Girard increasing his presence in Eeyou Istchee, more Cree weightlifters may be seeing the legend's 21-inch neck leaning over the bench-press bar to spot their lift.

"Other Cree communities are definitely a possibility," said Girard. "Once the program grows in Nemaska we can take the next step."

Girard is planning to visit Nemaska several days a month for the foreseeable future. If you'd like to find out when his next visit will be, contact the Nemaska Recreation Department.

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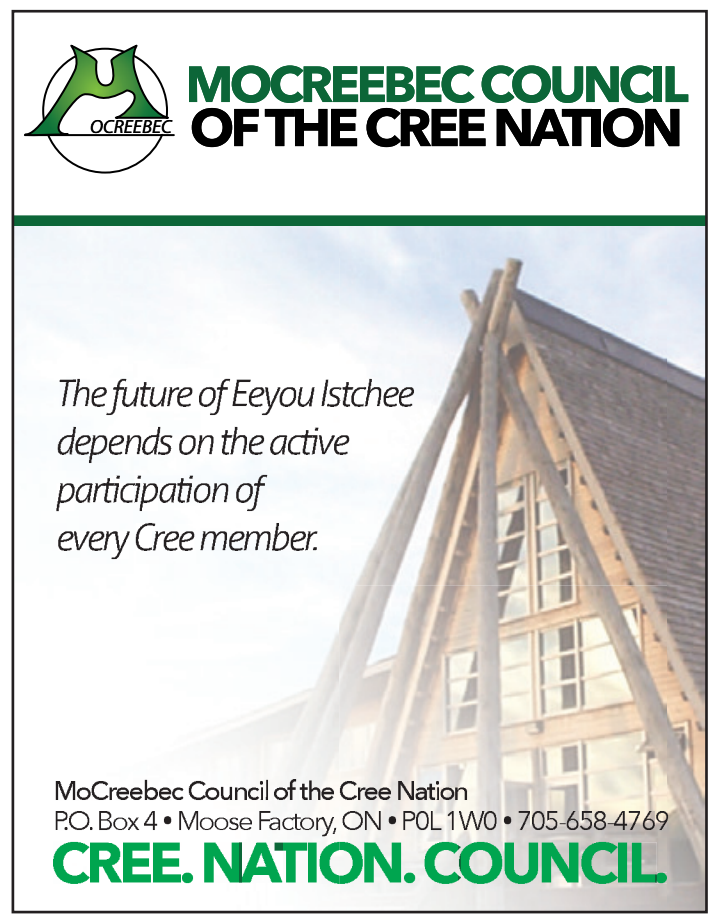
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Here's Nakuset!

New community TV program profiles urban Aboriginals in Montreal

by Amy German

A new public access TV program will showcase Montreal Indigenous peoples and services offered to help them survive in the city.

Beginning this September, *Indigenous Power* will be hosted by Nakuset, the Executive Director of the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal (NWSM). Part of a Bell initiative to create community television, it will be available through On Demand via the Bell Fibe digital TV service.

Though Nakuset isn't paid for writing, producing and hosting the show, she has access to a professional crew to ensure professional editing and technical aspects of the program.

Already a busy person with her fulltime gig running the NWSM and numerous public speaking activities on behalf of the city's Indigenous community, Nakuset said the opportunity arose from her frequent CTV interviews on Indigenous-related issues.

This led to an editorial board meeting at CTV Montreal with other individuals from the Indigenous community to help the station beef up local First Nations content.

"At the end of the meeting they said, 'By the way, CTV is owned by Bell and we have this thing called Bell Local, and we would like to know if there are any Aboriginals out there who would like to have a TV show,'" Nakuset recounted.

"I told them that I would love to be the Indian Oprah! While everybody laughed, they did call me the next day and said I could have a show."

Nakuset recognized a huge opportunity to put her passion and energy into showcasing the talent and accomplishments of Montreal's urban Aboriginal population for a wider audience.

While brainstorming for the show, Nakuset said it was easy with interview subjects to highlight because her work at the NWSM and the Native Friendship Centre of Montreal, as well participating in numerous committees and initiatives over the last two decades.

Artists like the Buffalo Hat Singers, Timothy Armstrong, drum group Odaia and throat singer Nina Segelles immediately came to mind for an episode on traditional musicians. Also to be featured are mainstream artists like singer Elisapie Isaac and rapper Samian for a program on pop musicians, and Resolution Pictures' Ernest Webb for a special on the film and TV industry.

With a total of seven episodes to be filmed this season, Nakuset will also focus on Aboriginal students and the university organizations that support them, the Inspirational Aboriginal Women project, the Cabot Square project and other local initiatives.

Nakuset said the role as TV host comes naturally. She jokingly calls herself the "inquisition-er," saying that she normally rattles off about 30 questions when she sits down with an interview subject.

"While I am new to this and am not really sure what I am doing, I feel like Andy Warhol because I am just bringing all of these really talented people together and coordinating them," Nakuset enthused. "I don't mind being in front of the camera because I do public speaking all of the time, it doesn't scare me. And, I want to bring this message forward: that there are 26,000 urban Aboriginals in Montreal and these are some of their stories."

Indigenous Power begins September 22.

Super squash

A wonderful seasonal guide celebrates a versatile vegetable

By Amy German

Most people may not think of squash as an everyday kind of a food, but they should.

Described as "one of the tastiest and most cookable, handsome, affordable and nutritious foods that one can find," *The Everyday Squash Cook: The Most Versatile & Affordable Superfood* by Rob Firing, Ivy Knight and Kerry Knight will help even a novice cook discover why you should be having a (culinary) love affair with these vegetables.

Nutrient dense, spectacularly flavourful and highly transportable, squash comes in many different varieties throughout the year and can add appealing, high-value nutrition to your dinner table.

For those not familiar with the many kinds of squash and the wonders that can be done with them, this book provides an introduction to nine of the varieties and a plethora of innovative recipes packed with flavour.

At the same time, the book provides practical information on squash that the average individual may not know but should. For example, the more orange-fleshed varieties of squash, like butternut or pumpkin, are especially nutritious. A typical serving provides more than 450% of the daily recommended value of Vitamin A, which is essential for good vision and eye health, strengthens the immune system, maintains healthy skin and can fight cancer.

Other varieties of squash, which are well described, have all sorts of wonderful properties such as being high in Vitamin C, potassium, B6, manganese, thiamine and magnesium.

Reading the many recipes in this book, it is easy to glean that incorporating squash into your weekly rotations of family meals is not only simple but also enticing. The recipes don't veer into the exotic, calling for countless hard-to-get or costly ingredients but instead come off as practical, easy to make and entirely appetizing.

While there are playful recipes like the one for "squashsicles" or spiced squash popsicles that seem like a great early Fall treat, there are other desirable delights that can be made relatively simply such as the "Savoury Buttercup & Sausage Bake with Currants," the "No Mess Baked Rigatoni with Sausage, Butternut and Tomato," or the "Roast Chicken Stuffed with Squash and Wild Rice."

A wonderful addition to your collection of cookbooks, T*he Everyday Squash Cook* provides an excellent argument to include squash in your everyday life.

But don't have to take my word for it, the following recipes speak volumes for themselves.

Fish Cakes & Zucchini Salad

Smoked fish, whether trout, sturgeon or mackerel, can be a lovely appetizer served on its own, or you can transform it into these marvellous fish cakes, which are crispy on the outside and soft and moist on the inside. Served over a simple zucchini salad, an appetizer-sized amount of smoked fish is easily stretched into a dinner for five.

Makes 4 to 5 fish cakes

Fish Cakes

- 2 cups flaked smoked trout, mackerel or other fish
- 1 tbsp capers, drained and chopped
- 1 tsp hot sauce (or more to taste)
- ¼ cup finely chopped red bell pepper
- 2 green onions, white and green parts, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp Dijon mustard
- 2 tbsps mayonnaise
- 1 ½ cups mashed roasted butternut or acorn squash
- 1 ½ cups mashed potatoes
- kosher salt and fresh cracked black pepper
- 1 cup dried breadcrumbs or panko breadcrumbs
- 1 egg
- pinch of cayenne (optional)

Butternut "Bacon"

When Rob Firing told us about butternut "bacon," we were sceptical – nothing can compare to the king of breakfast meats! But Rob showed us that butternut "bacon" can come pretty close. This is an amazing vegan recipe for the easiest and most magical-tasting fake bacon ever. Set it out on a platter and watch it disappear…

Makes 24 to 36 "bacon" strips

- 1 butternut squash, peeled and seeded
- grapeseed, peanut or vegetable oil
- kosher salt and fresh cracked black pepper

Using a Y-shaped vegetable peeler, peel the butternut squash. Next, peel the flesh into long strips, applying firm pressure for adequate thickness. Peel as many strips as you wish (about 6 to 8 strips per person); reserve any unused squash for another dish.

In a frying pan, heat 1/8 inch of oil (just enough to "float" the squash strips) over medium heat. Once the oil is shimmering, carefully place the a few strips of squash in the pan, being careful not to overcrowd. (We recommend doing a trial strip first, as butternut "bacon" cooks extremely quickly.)

Cook the bacon, flipping once, until the edges are lightly browned and a little crispy, about 10 to 15 seconds per side. Be careful not to overcook – dark, fully crisp "bacon" will taste burnt.

Transfer the cooked "bacon" to a plate lined with paper towel to absorb excess oil. (If cooking a large batch, keep warm in a low oven.) Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Tip: Try putting 2 or 3 strips of butternut "bacon" on top of a serving of green salad – it's a simple, elegant and tasty garnish. We also like to use any extra we have on hand in Breakfast Tacos and BLTs.

Zucchini Salad

- 1 zucchini, peeled into ribbons
- 1 bunch of watercress, stemmed
- honey-cider vinaigrette

Make the fish cakes: In a food processor fitted with the metal blade, pulse the smoked fish just until crumbled (be careful not to overprocess; you want the fish cakes to have some texture). Transfer the fish to a large bowl. Add the capers, hot sauce, red pepper, green onions, Dijon mustard, mayonnaise, squash and potato and stir well to combine. Finely dice 2 to 3 strips of zucchini and stir into the mixture.

Season with salt and pepper to taste, then stir in the egg until well combined. Using your hands, form the mixture into 4 or 5 patties. Cover and set aside in the refrigerator.

Prepare your breading station: In one bowl, combine the breadcrumbs and salt and pepper to taste (if you like, add a pinch of cayenne for some kick). In another bowl, beat the egg.

Dredge the fish patties in the breadcrumbs and dust off the excess, then dip them in the egg wash and end with a final coating of breadcrumbs. Cover and refrigerate.

In a frying pan, heat ¼ inch oil over medium-high heat (when a drop of water sizzles in the pan, it is hot enough). Cook the patties (be careful not to crowd the pan; you may have to cook these in batches) for 3 to 5 minutes each side, until golden brown. Keep warm in a low oven until all patties are fried and warmed through.

Make the salad: Meanwhile, toss the watercress and zucchini in a bowl with the vinaigrette.

To serve, make a bed of salad on each serving plate and top with one or two fish cakes. Garnish with salsa or tartar sauce and a lemon wedge alongside.

Pork, Squash & White Bean Chili

Replacing some of the legumes traditionally used in chili with butternut squash (diced to a similar size) adds a subtle sweetness and makes this version more nutritious without increasing calories. Rob likes to serve this with the Cheesy Squashy Cornbread.

Makes 8 to 12 servings

- 1 lb medium ground pork
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 can (28 oz) diced tomatoes, with juice
- 1 can (5½ oz) tomato paste
- 2 cups peeled cubed (½ inch) butternut squash
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1½ tbsps chili powder
- ½ tsp cayenne
- ½ tsp ground cumin
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 tsps salt
- 1 tsp fresh cracked black pepper
- 1 can (14 oz) cannellini or white kidney beans, rinsed and drained

In a large saucepan over medium-high heat, cook the ground pork until browned, about 8 minutes. Pour off all the fat except about 2 tablespoons. Reduce the heat to medium and stir in the onion. Cook until the onion is browned, about 3 minutes. Add the tomatoes, breaking them up with the back of the spoon. Stir in the tomato paste. Add the squash, garlic, chili powder, cayenne, cumin, bay leaves, salt and pepper and stir to combine. Reduce the heat to low, cover and cook for 15 to 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in the beans and continue to cook until the squash is tender, about 15 minutes.

Recipes from The Everyday Squash Cook by Rob Firing , Ivy Knight & Kerry Knight ©2014. Photographs © Reena Newman; Butternut Bacon Photograph ©Christopher Campbell. Published by HarperCollins Canada. All rights reserved.

Butternut Brownies

It might sound strange, but adding butternut squash is the key to absolutely scrumptious brownies. The delicate squash flavour is overshadowed by the chocolate, but you won't believe the difference its presence makes to these moist and rich brownies.

Makes 16 brownies

- 1½ cups diced (¼ to ½ inch) butternut squash
- 6 tablespoons butter
- 6 ounces semi-sweet chocolate, chopped
- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- ¾ cups all-purpose flour
- ½ tsp kosher salt
- ¼ tsp baking powder
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 2 eggs
- 2 tsps pure vanilla extract

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease an 8-inch square baking pan or line it with parchment paper, allowing a few inches to hang over each side. Butter the parchment paper (if using) and set pan aside.

Bring a saucepan filled with enough water to cover squash to a rolling boil, then add squash and cook for 6 to 10 minutes, or until tender. Drain well and set aside.

In a double boiler over medium-high heat, combine the butter, chocolate and cocoa powder, stirring constantly until smooth. Remove from heat and set aside.

In a separate bowl, whisk together the flour, salt and baking powder.

In a mixing bowl, cream together the sugar, eggs and vanilla. Add the chocolate mixture and mix until combined. Add the flour mixture and mix until well blended. Fold in the squash.

Pour the batter into the prepared pan. Bake in preheated oven for 35 to 40 minutes or until a toothpick poked in the centre comes out clean (a little melted chocolate is fine!). Remove from the oven and cool in the pan for about 15 minutes.

Grab the ends of the parchment paper and lift the slab from the pan. Place on a wire rack to cool completely before cutting into squares.

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Getting ready for winter

by Xavier Kataquapit

The forest surrounding the lake near my cottage is dense with pine, birch and poplar trees. There are many kinds of brush, blueberry plants, mushrooms and plentiful wildlife. There's lots of activity on the banks of the lake in September.

I am also getting ready for the cold weather. I'm building up my stockpile of firewood, doing maintenance on the cottage by ensuring the roof is ready for tons of snow, cleaning the woodstove chimney creosote, properly sealing the windows, and by making sure the foundation is secure and that everything is waterproof.

As I hurry about my day I notice that I am not alone in my chores. The squirrels or Ah-Nee-Koo-Cha-Sh are readying their little homes for the coming winter. I see them when I look up from my own work. They are scurrying here and there with their tiny mouths stuffed with grass, leaves and anything that might help them keep the cold out of their nests.

The other day I caught one tearing the white strands of cotton from the beard of my porch ornament Santa. I had been noticing that Santa was looking like he had been shaving recently. To make matters worse Ah-Nee-Koo-Cha-Sh had decided that this year he was going to move into my cottage crawl space, and he needed Santa's beard to make his home nice and cozy.

My battle last year with a skunk, or Shee-Ka-K, came to mind. Boris, as I came to call him, decided to move into the crawl space in late September. I fought a long, hard war with him for months before giving up as I headed south.

Now, I realized that I would be dealing with both Boris the Shee-Ka-K and Ah-Nee-Koo-Cha-Sh under my living-room floor so I started thinking creatively. After doing some research I discovered that I could purchase sheets of metal grate from the hardware store that would close off access to the cottage crawl space. In one full day of cutting, shaping and fastening the metal grates I had given notice to Boris the Shee-Ka-K and Ah-Nee-Koo-Cha-Sh that they were no longer wanted as tenants.

For the first time in a while my place actually has a pleasant odour about it. There is the pine scent from the wood floors and walls and the smell of chicken baking in the oven. The distinct skunky and assorted small-animal smells are gone. The scamper of little feet under my floorboards and shuffling here and there are mere memories of my little friends. These creatures have not given up easy as I can see their digging marks all around the metal grating that surrounds the cottage. Try as they might they will never get in. I wish them well in their search for a new apartment, but I must admit I am happy not to be a landlord to freeloading, smelly and noisy tenants.

No doubt about it, winter is coming. The flock of geese or Niska I noticed high overhead the lake heading south today is a sure sign. The beaver or Amisk I noticed out on the lake almost seems frantic gathering wood for his den down the far bay. The fact that he considers the brush on my lake frontage a delicacy delights me to no end. He keeps that tangled mess cleaned up so I consider him a valued neighbour. The Whiskey Jays or Wee-Sah-Ki-Cha-K are beginning to appear here and there like so many grey and white tree ornaments on the tall pines. Soon they will be getting brave and coming close to see if I have something to offer them for a treat.

All those blood-sucking mosquitoes or Sah-Kah-Meh-Oo have more or less called it a season and they took the black flies, horse flies and deer flies with them. There are many wonderful things that happen as a result of the cold weather. Those huge, ugly, monster-like spruce bugs are finally gone too. I believe I spent half the month of August throwing them off my neck or torso, wrestling them to the ground and then stomping the life out of them.

On a sad note, the little songbirds that performed as a choir on summer mornings have likewise flown their coop. I will miss the singing Loon or Mah-Kwa family, though grateful for another summer rich with the sounds of Mah-Kwa far off down the lake in the middle of the night.

All is not yet lost. The eagles or Mee-Kee-Soo are still keeping an eye on the lake. Closer to earth they are assisted by the hawks, or Mee-Kee-Sheesh. The ravens or Kah-Kah-Koo run in gangs up and down the lake and all around the forest reaping havoc wherever they go. They make a multitude of sounds that don't resemble birds at all and they love to park themselves close by on the tall pines to watch me work.

So winter, come. We are all ready for you. Your frigid winds, icy storms and blowing snow will make us all happy to be snug and cozy inside. It is a welcome turn of the season.

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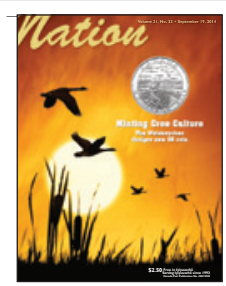

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